



# Falling Through the Net; implications of digital exclusion

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# Digital Divides

- Digital participation is *'...moving from conferring advantage on those that have it to conferring active disadvantage on those who are without it.'*

UK National Plan for Digital Participation  
(2010:5)

# Digital Inclusion: advantages

- financial savings,
- access to formal and informal learning opportunities,
- employment potential,
- improved salary prospects,
- many other economic, social and cultural advantages...

UK National Plan for Digital Participation (2010:5)

# Race Online 2012



- ‘We're all better off when everyone's online’.
- Government drivers for online delivery
  - increase transparency and accountability
  - improve convenience & efficiency of public services
  - digital engagement: a significant contributor to building a Big Society
- Requirement for ‘behavioural change’

# Digital Exclusion

- older people,
- low income households,
- people with no formal qualifications,
- single parents,
- disabled people,
- new immigrants,
- geographically remote communities.

# Digital Exclusion: realities

- Users of assistive technology
- Challenge to fixed format of printed page
- Gutenberg to Google: access denied



# Social model of disability

- Socially constructed barriers
- Need to change the question from:
  - ‘What problems are you having with access?’  
to:
  - ‘What is preventing you from having access?’
- Social model of digital disability?

- “Readers said they were surprised about some of the statements about accessibility as there is special software for those with special needs and there is guidance for software developers related to meeting the needs of those with special needs.”



# An Evolving Internet

- DOS to Windows
- Web/WAI 1.0 to Web/WAI 2.0
- User generated content
- File sharing
- Online shopping
- Social networking
- Access to information/knowledge

# Digital Exclusion: realities

- non-participation,
- disempowerment,
- disfranchisement,
- *‘Many socially excluded people and communities are shut out from the digital technologies which are starting to form the backbone of the modern knowledge economy.’*

UK Digital Britain Report (2009:12)

# Digital Exclusion: implications

- Anti Oppressive Practices,
- Digital Equity = Social Equity,
- Social Model of Disability,
- Do service users have a right to:
  - affordable Internet access?
  - appropriate assistive technologies?
  - essential digital confidence and competencies?

# Digital Exclusion: evidence

Example from social work practice in the UK

- increasing moves toward personalised, user-controlled services (DoH 2007),
- drives to improve information sharing across disciplines and with users,
- pilot projects in adult services include a range of technological solutions aimed at increasing user participation...but...

# Digital Access

The value base of professional social work practice encompasses:

*'a global concern for the achievement of greater equality in the allocation of social goods between nations, communities and individuals'*

Banks (2008:34)

# Future research plans...

- qualitative research investigating the reality of digital exclusion,
- identified areas include:
  - assistive technology and inclusive practice,
  - access issues for the visually impaired,
  - narratives of exclusion,
  - implications for the social work agenda.

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